

STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE WAYNE GILCHREST AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS HEARING ON MARINE PROTECTED AREAS: MAY 23, 2002.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today. As most of you know, the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act has been one of the top priorities of the Subcommittee during the 107th Congress, and we have just finished a Subcommittee mark-up on H.R. 4749, the Magnuson-Stevens Act Amendments of 2002. I appreciate the witnesses patience as we worked through the mark-up process prior to the start of this hearing.

Today's hearing is focused on the use of marine protected areas as a fishery management tool, as a means to protect and restore ecosystem function, and as a research tool. I believe it is of fundamental importance that we continue our recent progress to prevent overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks, reduce bycatch, and protect essential fish habitats. All these actions represent important steps towards implementing a comprehensive, ecosystem-based fishery management strategy for the United States. I believe that there is a strong scientific basis for using marine protected areas as one of the fishery management tools to accomplish these objectives and to implement ecosystem-based fishery management. MPAs represent one way to ensure that we're only withdrawing the interest and not the principle from our marine resource bank accounts.

However, I also recognize that some MPA proposals may raise significant controversy, especially provisions for establishing no-take reserves, where removal or disturbance of all fishery and other resources is prohibited. We need to keep in mind that no-take reserves have a legitimate place within a broad strategy to conserve ocean resources, and that the process of establishing such reserves must be based on sound science and must include participation from the full range of affected stakeholders

I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses and hope that we can have a constructive discussion that will continue to move us toward better management of the Nation's marine resources.

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